

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6984

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 13173

1. WE ARE ACCUMULATING SOME EVIDENCE OF NEW DECISIONS MADE BY THE RULING DIRG, AND RUMORS OF OTHERS, THAT MAY RPT MAY FORECAST SOME MOVEMENT IN A GENERALLY MORE MODERATE DIRECTION. THE EVIDENCE IS STILL VERY TENUOUS, AND TO SOME EXTENT BASED ON GUESSWORK. WE WOULD NOT ORDINARILY TRANSMIT SUCH SPECULATIONS BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT A NEW ASSESSMENT IS BEING DRAFTED IN WASHINGTON AND BELIEVE WE SHOULD FURNISH OUR GUESSTIMATES NOW, NOTWITHSTANDING THEIR TENTATIVE NATURE.

2. DEPT AND SOME ADDRESSEES WILL KNOW FROM RECENT EMBASSY REPORTS THAT DIRG IS UNDERGOING SOME KIND OF SELF-CRITICISM, PROBABLY BASED ON (A) REALIZATION THAT POLICIES DURING PAST YEAR HAVE NOT RESULTED IN POPULACE GIVING WHOLEHEARTED SUPPORT TO DIRG; (B) DISSATISFACTION WITH LEADERSHIP OF TWO VICE-CHAIRMEN MENGHISTU AND ATNAFU, AND ESPECIALLY WITH THEIR CONSTANT RIVALRY AND JOCKEYING AGAINST EACH OTHER FOR POWER. IF RUMORS ARE CORRECT, GENERAL TREND WILL BE TOWARD MODERATION (WITHIN LEFT-SOCIALIST FRAMEWORK) AND CONSOLIDATION OF PAST GAINS RATHER THAN ADDING NEW AND DIVISIVE INITIATIVES. WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS OR REFUTES THESE RUMORS. THE FOLLOWING RECENT DIRG DECISIONS MAY RPT MAY BE PERTINENT:

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A. ON ERITREA. SINCE FIGHTING FLARED IN FEBRUARY THERE HAVE BEEN SHARP DEBATES WITHIN MILITARY ABOUT BEST POLICY, BUT THE HARD-

LINE MILITARY-FORCE ADVOCATES HAVE WON OUT. NOW WE HEAR EVIDENCE OF REALIZATION THAT MILITARY SOLUTION IS IMPOSSIBLE. WE ALSO HAVE (1) FONMIN'S TRIP TO KHARTOUM WHICH RESULTED IN MUCH MORE FORTHCOMING EPMG PUBLIC STANCE TOWARD NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT; (2) PLANNED (BUT NOT YET IMPLEMENTED) OPENING OF ROAD TRAFFIC AROUND ASMARA; (3) AND PLANNED (BUT NOT YET IMPLEMENTED) LIBERALIZATION OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION POLICIES.

B. ON COMPENSATION FOR NATIONALIZED FOREIGN FIRMS - DIRG HAS AGREED TO SCRAP PUBLICATION OF (RATHER RESTRICTIVE AND UNSATISFACTORY) SET OF "PRINCIPLES" FOR COMPENSATION, IN FAVOR OF CONCRETE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL FIRM. (NOTE: THIS DECISION ADMITTEDLY PREDATES DIRG SELF-EXAMINATION, BUT CONSTITUTES HOPEFUL SIGN OF PRAGMATISM AND OF POSSIBLE EPMG REALIZATION THAT REASONABLE CLIMATE FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT IS ESSENTIAL.)

C. IT IS ALSO WIDELY RUMORED THAT THE DIRG HAS SOUGHT AND PERHAPS ACCEPTED ADVICE FROM NOTABLE, CAPABLE MODERATES OF THE ANCIEN REGIME. WHILE MOST OF THE PERSONS WHOSE NAMES MENTIONED ARE CURRENTLY STILL IN DETENTION, RECENTLY RELEASED FORMER FONMIN MINASSIE HAILE FIGURES PROMINENTLY AMONG THEM. IT IS EMBASSY'S VIEW THAT IF THESE FIGURES ARE IN FACT ADVISING THE DIRG, THEY ARE MOST LIKELY TO URGE MODERATION, CONCILIATION, ACCOMMODATION OF CONTENDING ECONOMIC AND ETHNIC GROUPS, AND CONSOLIDATION OF SOCIAL GAINS MADE THUS FAR, NOT RADICAL NEW PROGRAMS.

3. WHILE THE ABOVE RUMORS AND VAGUE INDICATIONS DO NOT GIVE US ENOUGH TO PREDICT FUTURE EPMG POLICIES WITH ANY CERTAINTY, THEY DO INDICATE A YEASTY POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE WHERE MODERATION MAY PLAY A MORE PROMINENT ROLE THAN IN THE PAST.
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